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SUBJECT: CHAD'S DINOSAUR POPULATION DIMINISHED BY ONE

¶1. Chad's political class, comprised of an amorphous group of middle-aged bureaucrats and progeny of traditional chiefs representing ethnicities rather than ideologies, and an aging group of weathered politicians affectionately referred to as "the dinosaurs," was recently diminished with the June 12 passing of Chad's second president, General Felix Malloum, at the American hospital in Neuilly, France. Although Malloum had already removed himself from political activity since 1979, he played a key role in the transition of southern to northern-dominated rule in Chad and has, since then, earned the respect of many Chadians more for the way he conducted himself while out of office than for the four brief years he was in. End summary.

¶2. General Felix Malloum served as Chad's second president from 1975-79. He was thrust into power following the April 13, 1975 assassination of President Ngarta Tombalbaye by a group of young army officers who objected, among other things, to the arbitrary arrest two years earlier in 1973, of several fellow officers. Malloum had been among those arrested in June 1973 for allegedly participating in "the black sheep plot." At that time, President Tombalbaye was pushing his "authenticity" agenda encouraging Chadians to return to their African roots through the introduction of new nomenclature, changes in the wording of salutations, and forced initiations, while at the same time wrestling with paranoid visions of his removal from office. When a prominent female politician buried a black sheep across the river from Chad's capital in Kousseri, Cameroon with the alleged purpose of regime change, she was arrested; Malloum, accused of complicity, soon followed. A group of young officers, led by Chad's current Defense Minister (another dinosaur), General Kamougue Wadal Abdelkadre, invested the presidential palace April 13, 1975 and assassinated Tombalbaye. Malloum was thereupon liberated from his prison cell and thrust into the head of state position a month later.

¶3. His four-year period of power marks the transition phase between the southern-dominated post-independence government of President Tombalbaye and the northern-dominated governments of presidents Goukouni, Habre and Deby which ensued from violent regime change. Though unable to prevent the outbreak of hostilities in 1979, referred to in the vernacular as "la guerre de Malloum" (Malloum's War), Malloum is given high marks by many observers and witnesses to this turbulent period as a peace-maker who was sincere in his reconciliation efforts with the northern-led FROLINAT insurgency. The 1978 Khartoum Accords, for example, brought Habre out of the rebellion and into the government as Chad's first Prime Minister. Given the latter's political ambitions, this gesture proved nothing less than opening the gates of Troy.

¶4. Another costly Malloum error was his September 1975 demand that French troops be withdrawn from Chad following the French government's direct negotiations with Chadian rebels holding hostage French anthropologist, Francoise Claustre. Malloum later requested the French military's return in 1978 to turn back a FROLINAT offensive, which it succeeded in doing; at some point, however, the French military shifted its support to Habre's rebellion, a policy at odds with the Elysee and with the French Ambassador. During the cease-fire period that followed allowing for peace

talks and power-brokering on the part of Nigeria, Malloum resigned as Chad's president and took up residence in Lagos where he remained until 2002 when repeated efforts from President Deby resulted in his return to Chad. During his 23 years of exile, Malloum reportedly followed events in Chad closely but never commented on them. Upon his return to Chad, he was named by President Deby to a Council of Elders but continued to remain aloof of politics.

¶5. Most of the testimonials that have been published since the June 12 announcement of Malloum's death in France focus on his character. The qualities of restraint and reserve, calmness of demeanor, modesty, and measured language appear repeatedly. A current opposition figure also emanating from the dinosaur era, Lol Mahamat Choua, eulogized Malloum as being "extremely calm, modest, I'd almost say taciturn...the quintessential military officer who rarely opens his mouth, but when he does, speaks well and honestly...Destiny made him Head of State, but I can assure you, nothing could have been further from his wishes." Malloum was the product of French training, having attended several military academies and serving in French Indochina. He rapidly moved his way up the ranks and was considered a model officer. When thrust into the limelight from his prison cell, he was unable to turn back the mounting wave of northern rebellion in Chad but later showed how a fallen leader can continue to lead out a life of honor and dignity through discipline and restraint.

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